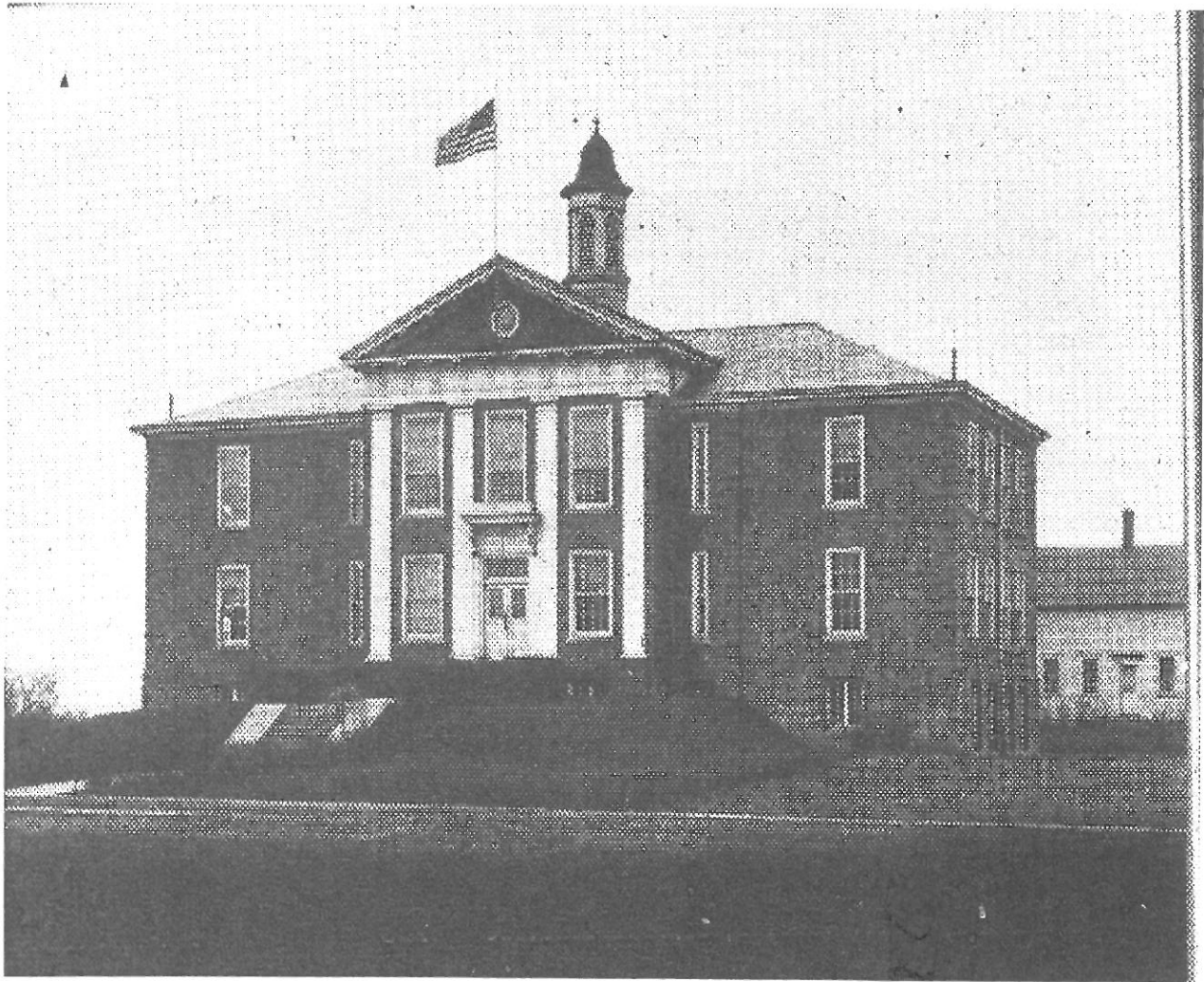


**Historic Center School  
Mantua Township, Ohio  
March 1, 2014**



**Built in 1914**  
**Listed on the National Register of Historic Places September 2013**  
Review Prepared by Portage County Regional Planning Commission

**Brief Overview**

Mantua Center School was built in 1914. It served the community as a public school until it was closed in early 2000's and then purchased by Mantua Township. The debt service is to be paid off by November 2014. The School was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 4<sup>th</sup> 2013. There was not any information available about the importance of the school at this time by the National Register.

During the almost 10 years of ownership by Mantua Township the school has largely been unused; hence the need to facilitate various community discussions and research what other repurposed schools have done. More recently the school has been used for Township offices and to facilitate a community center activity. The gymnasium has been used for various events; such as, rentals and sporting activities but on limited basis and it is not actively marketed beyond the community for its availability.

Mantua Township desires to find a use or uses that would put the school into a more continuous use and help to cover the cost of operation and maintenance. See Maps 1 and 2 for an aerial and existing land uses in the Center School area. It is anticipated that some of the space would be used for Township offices and possibly other community related space such as a youth/senior center.

Portage County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) was asked to facilitate community meetings, and also to meet with the Mantua-Shalersville Chamber of Commerce, talk with realtors, local colleges, and social service providers to gauge their interest and/or seek feedback on the potential use of the school.

While the RPC staff is aware of maintenance needs and recognizes that the school is not entirely in move-in ready condition, the RPC is not qualified to make estimations on cost for either maintenance or operation of the building. The RPC role is to facilitate and gather information to be shared with Mantua Township Trustees and the community as whole.

### Community Meeting #1, October 22, 2013

Top responses as selected by the participants that evening:

The School should be:	The School should not be:	Concerns with the School:
Township Offices Civic Center Torn Down Senior Center Sheriff's Office Kids Center Day Care Education Garage Service Business Incubator	Torn Down Sold A Levy to Support Residential Divisive Issue Day Care County Offices	Cost of Maintenance Being Demolished Being a Levy Being Divisive Being a Ballot Issue Loss of History Indecision Being Sold Retaining the Annex

See appendix #1 for all the comments

This community meeting was meant to be informal and for information gathering purposes. Based upon the responses there are some strong opinions as to what should happen. There is also a noticeable divide with respect to using the school or disposing of it (whether selling it or demolishing it). These strong feelings have likely contributed to the indecision of local officials.

### Community Meeting #2 January 29, 2014

RPC presented our findings to-date in an informal manner. The purpose of this meeting was to provide an update and to see if any other opinion would be expressed. The following list includes all suggestions received presented in order:

- Use Debt Service as a Maintenance Fund
- Reach out to local Fire Dept. as another location to improve response time
- Used for voting and renting annex
- Antique store like in Aurora
- Township to create a social media page to share ideas
- Grants need and end use and or a plan
- Currently a community center, one day a week starting in March
- 3 Township offices in their now, Finance, Zoning and Cemetery
- Something like the RAC in Ravenna (gym)
- More communication with the citizens from the Trustees to know what's happening
- Use as a storm shelter
- Renovations should be staged to spread out costs
- Community center or record storage
- Make use of what we have volunteers, donations and grants

- Better communication will let people know there is space available
- Storage (what is stored and weight a concern)
- Look for cost sharing opportunities with other local communities.
- Flea Market - What is happening in Streetsboro is profitable.
- Main floor for Township offices everything else a plus never meant to make money

There were many great ideas expressed, most revolving around communication, volunteerism and donations. There appears to be a community spirit to work together. Some Suggest that maybe surrounding communities or agencies should be approached about using the space and sharing the costs. Business ideas like storage, flea markets, antiques shows or shops may be relatively easy to make happen without a lot of extra expense and could be studied further.

### **Mantua-Shalersville Chamber of Commerce Meeting November 20, 2013**

The intent of this meeting was to generate input just from the local area businesses and see if we could find some potential interest in the school. We received 15 completed surveys from those who attended the Chamber event.

The survey listed 11 of the uses identified at the Community Meeting in October and asked participants to rank them in order of desirability. The results are listed by score, with 1 being most desirable and 5 being least desirable.

1) Non-Profit	1.33
2) Community Youth/Senior Center	1.40
3) Township offices	1.47
4) Place for Special Events	1.85
5) Business Incubator	1.92
6) Child Day Care	1.92
7) Place for Child/Adult classes	2.17
8) Office Space	2.58
9) Sheriff's Office	2.62
10) Museum	3.15
11) Retail	3.62

### **What other uses would really help the Mantua –Shalersville area?**

**Responses (in no order):**

Emergency Shelter

Light Industrial

Meeting Place For adults and kids  
A Mediterranean or Chinese restaurant  
Community Dinner or Meeting Place  
Gym Rentals  
Meeting Hall of all kinds i.e., Township Trustees Association

**Do you have any recommendations on how to best use the space?**

**Responses (in no order):**

Township Offices  
Incubator for small businesses  
Government Center for the sheriff, like a break room  
Senior Center  
Non-Profit  
Township Offices/ Community Center  
Basketball, Volleyball  
Storage

**Should the School be saved?**

Yes 14 93%  
No 1 7%

**Should the School be saved even if it were subsidized?**

Yes 14 93%  
No 1 7%

The results were not surprising as they were similar from what we had seen at the community meeting. This in turn led to a request to send an email to only Mantua-Shalersville Chamber members. It was observed that there may have been a handful of non-chamber members there who were given a survey to fill out. The concern was raised that this survey may not have truly represented the chamber members' feelings or input on the subject.

### **Online Chamber/Community Survey**

As a result of the concerns over the chamber survey not being unbiased, RPC prepared the identical survey that was distributed on November 20<sup>th</sup>. There was a delay in getting the survey redistributed out to the Chamber and finally RPC began to receive responses on February 10<sup>th</sup>. However a newspaper article inadvertently disclosed the link to the survey and we ended up with 167 survey responses. Because this number far exceeded the 15 surveys we received at the November 20<sup>th</sup> Chamber meeting we have to conclude this is a community survey, and not representative of Chamber members.

The survey results are listed in order of most desirable to least desirable:

1) Township Offices	2.30
2) Place for Special Events	2.33
3) Community Center Youth/Senior Center	2.34
4) Place for Child/Adult classes	2.53
5) Child Day Care	2.54
6) Non-Profit	2.56
7) Office Space	2.62
8) Sheriff's Office	2.63
9) Museum	2.89
10) Business Incubator	2.95
11) Retail	3.40

### **What other uses would really help the Mantua –Shalersville area?**

**Responses (in no order):**

- Community Gardens
- Emergency Shelter
- Farmer's Market
- Flea market
- Consignment Shop
- Library
- Light Industrial
- Meeting Place For adults and kids
- Artisan Shops
- Bingo
- Gym Rentals
- Retail

## **Do you have any recommendations on how to best use the space?**

### **Responses (in no order):**

- Township Offices
- A place for sports leagues, basketball and volley ball
- Multi-purpose gym
- Satellite Office for the Sheriff
- Incubator for small businesses
- Charter School
- Historical Society
- Museum
- Community Education Classes
- Emergency Shelter
- Library
- Grocery Store
- Non-Profit
- Township Offices/ Community Center
- Storage

## **Should the School be saved?**

Yes 98 75.4%

No 32 24.6%

## **Should the School be saved even if it were subsidized?**

Yes 89 68.5%

No 41 31.5%

Results of both surveys are found in Appendices 2 and 3.

The Chamber survey, which is one tenth the size of the community survey, had some noticeable differences. These differences are evident in the choices of which uses were most desirable. Non-profits were the most preferred in the Chamber survey but then dropped to sixth in the community survey and the business incubator was fifth in the Chamber survey but plummeted to tenth in the community survey.

The comments between the two surveys also varied when discussing the type of uses that would also be beneficial with some variations on a theme. The community survey included comments to sell, tear

down or not spend any more money on the building. Reviewing appendix 3 would be helpful to see the comments that were provided.

In the community survey when asked should the school be saved, three fourths said yes. When asked again in the community survey whether it should even if subsidized, the numbers slightly decreased but remained above a two thirds favorable consideration.

### **Area Realtors**

For consistency we contacted the Shalersville Township Trustees to let us know their experience with owning and operating a repurposed school. Their experience for the most part was positive as they were able to rent the school to a day care and the Portage County School District for students with disciplinary problems. They also rented out the gymnasium for special events, dance classes and a local church group. The day care and school were **paying \$10 per square foot** which seemed to cover the operating expenses and helped to pay off the building.

However, the day care choose to move to a new location after being at the school for several years and the classes for Portage County also ceased when additional student relation problems occurred causing the school district to relocate as well.

Now Shalersville is also looking for tenants, and are presently charging the Church approximately \$250-\$300 a month; which works out to **\$4.50 per square foot**. The concern is they need to find another tenant soon before maintenance costs catch up with the lower revenues they are receiving.

We also spoke with a land owner from Mantua Village. They are currently renting and trying to rent office space at **\$8.50-\$9.00 per square foot**. The demand is not overwhelming at this time as they have vacant office space.

The RPC office also rents office space in our building. There are three offices, with two of them going unrented for 8 years and a major drain on our resources. The lack of use also resulted in some costly renovations which the RPC could not afford. Overtime the RPC was able to work with a new business and agency to locate in those offices by providing an allowance to fix and update those units to a more contemporary status. They received reduced rent because they were taking on a project that needed special care. Both the new business and the new agency assumed the utilities immediately and once their allowance was used up we began to collect rent again and have offices that are very marketable going forward.



### **Non-Profit Interest**

The RPC spoke with Family and Community Services about the possibility of using one or several of the class room spaces at the Mantua Center School. Family and Community Services is probably one of the largest non-profit organizations in Portage County handling a wide range of social and community services. They are interested in locating an office in the Mantua area and believe they have at least 3 community service programs that would do well in Mantua Township. They would be interested in using one classroom and if things worked out well then they may take on more spaces, but first they would have to work up to the need for additional spaces. Starting off would be more about making sure the need was there to support them being there.

### **Entrepreneurial Schools**

RPC also spoke with representatives from Hiram College. They are currently working in Ravenna with a project and on their campus with potential incubators. They would be interested in the space for a low rate as they do not pay rent for the building that is being used in Ravenna. In speaking with Ravenna City representatives they are concerned that not enough is happening with their space. They would like to see Hiram College take a more active role in promoting the space and to date that has not happened.

RPC would recommend that before a business incubator can occur, a relationship between Hiram College or Kent State University and the Township Trustees needs to be established with clear expectations identified.

### **Grants and Funding Opportunities**

There are a variety of grants that will not help with providing rent but may help with renovations costs and in turn help to attract tenants. The following is a list of potential grants.

**Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** – They can be used to serve low to moderate income (LMI) communities, groups or individuals. Mantua Township is not LMI community as a whole, but CDBG monies could be used to build a handicap ramp for accessibility or a related project which would help seniors access the building. As an example the Portage County Commissioners use CDBG monies to fund the Portage County Senior Center in Ravenna.

**Local Government Innovation Fund (LGIF)** – there are both grants and loans available that result in collaboration and or cost sharing. The loans are designed to be paid back via the cost savings that is being realized from whatever improvement was funded.

**Storm Water Implementation Fund (SWIF) grants** - SWIF grants can be used as demonstration projects for water quality treatment. An example would be to use pavers or permeable asphalt on some or all the parking area. The amount of the grant is limited to \$150,000. The RPC received a grant to partially pave our parking lot and create a bio-swale; which resulted in a combination paving/beautification project.

**Historic Preservation grants** – There are grants for historic preservation. We have not looked into likelihood of the School receiving a grant but would encourage the Township to investigate further, or the RPC could add that to our responsibilities to serve the Township.

**Private Foundations** – There are private foundation grants. These grants however are typically tied to a specific area and may have strict requirements for restoration versus a rehabilitation.

**Private Donations and In-Kind Labor**- There maybe opportunities to raise funding through community members who wish to do a fund drive, donations of all or part of the materials needed to do the rehabilitation, or volunteer labor. This could be a fun and exciting community project which everyone could share in pulling it together.

## **Other Issues**

**Cost of rehabilitation and Improvements to the building and site** – There are several issues related to maintenance and upkeep to the site. That cost analysis or needs assessment was not part of this study and should done to understand the budgeting needs and determining how to set rental fees. The number of units rented will determine what the Township may be responsible for.

**Not-for-Profit vs For Profit** – Our understanding that until the debt service is paid off that no “for profit” businesses can be renters. That will obviously limit who the renters can be until November 2014. There may also be a property tax issue depending on who the renters are and how that is determined by the County Auditor’s office.

**Zoning** – The Building and property is in an R1 and R3 residential zoning classifications. Schools and government properties are typically conditional uses, but when we start adding in daycare, social service offices or offices not meant for government use then there may be a zoning issue. RPC would recommend evaluating extending the “B” or “C-1” Commercial district to include the school property along with other property that may be appropriate for commercial use in this area, see map 3.

## Observations

The following two tables are observations we have made. The first table being “Users and Uses Table generalize but breaks down the type of potential users and matches them with the type of uses that maybe appropriate for the Building.

**Users and Uses**

Potential Users	Potential Uses
Non- or Not-for-Profit	Variety of social and community service programs; Family and Community Services; County Agencies; Medical etc.
Government	Township Offices; Sheriff Substation; Fire Department; Maybe jointly run shared cost with a neighboring Township(s) or City
Private Sector	Offices; Artisan Shops; Business Incubator; Gym; Day Care; Flea Market; Food Hub; Farmer’s Market
Community	Community Consignment Shop for residents to sell their crafts; Youth and senior community center; Adult Classes; A variety of sports leagues; Churches; Special events; Museum
No One	Remain Vacant; Sold; Demolished

The next table “Range of Opportunities” matches up different cost options with considerations as well as generalized ‘pros” and “cons”.

### Range of Opportunities

<b>Costs</b>	<b>Considerations</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Low to No Cost	Volunteers; Grants – no match; Sponsors; Implement Levy (if approved)	Very little impact to township budget to coordinate or organize; Volunteers and sponsors have a positive community image and inspire community pride	Very difficult to get grants; volunteers and sponsors that are capable to complete the needed work may be difficult; Levy may not be approved
Some Costs	Grants –with some match requirement; minor repairs \$50k or less, Selling the School; Tenant Allowance for repairs (rent offset by repairs, but utilities are being paid); Levy (put on ballot)	All of these option would include some cost to the Township	Very difficult to get grants; Selling the school lose control of the site and use or fate of the school; A levy may or may not be approved and may further the divisiveness of this issue in the community.
Moderate Costs	Grants with 50%+ match; Moderate repairs \$50k-\$100k	Grants would at least cover some of the costs, Spending \$50K to \$100K should make most of the building habitable	Grants are difficult to get and only cover half the cost, Spending \$50-\$100k may not completely finish the building and still leave it somewhat desirable
High Costs	Major Renovations; Demolition	Either the building is completely restored or it is gone.	Still need tenants to cover cost of utilities and future maintenance for sustainability; or if demolished lose all the money ever spent on the building; a building on the National Register of Historic Places and a community landmark and potential asset is lost forever

## Conclusion:

The school building sitting mostly vacant is not serving the community and costing the Township valuable financial resources. Unquestionably this has become a divisive issue in the community. As a long-time landmark of the community and being listed on the National Register of Historic Places the restoration of the school building should be and still can be a rallying point in the community. Before taking the drastic steps of selling off the building and or demolishing it. RPC recommends the Trustees establish volunteer committees with the goal of fully restoring and utilizing the school with an eye to sustainability of the facility including future maintenance costs. **These committees should include a needs assessment committee, a grant and/or foundation committee, volunteers and sponsors committee and a building utilization committee.** We would recommend the committees be formed using as many people who wish to participate in the process. The various committees should be coordinated and report back to the Trustees of their progress or programming as necessary. The Trustees could set November as a major reporting mile stone or the end of this year. If at that time the conclusion is that funds and resources are not being raised in the community then proceed with a levy to cover the shortfall and to provide for the longevity of the school facility.

We believe this approach will empower the community to largely be involved in bringing the school up to current standards and full utilization.

A quick fix, if necessary for financial reasons would be to go to the levy format. The Township could still implement the committees and realistically the Township will need to be as flexible as possible if it wants to bring in tenants sooner than later.

There are really a number of different routes the Township Trustees could go with their decision making, understanding that funds are limited and costs continue to be realized without supporting revenue. RPC believes a multi-pronged approach as described may be what is necessary to renovate the building and proactively find tenants and fully engage the community.

## **Maps 1, 2 and 3**

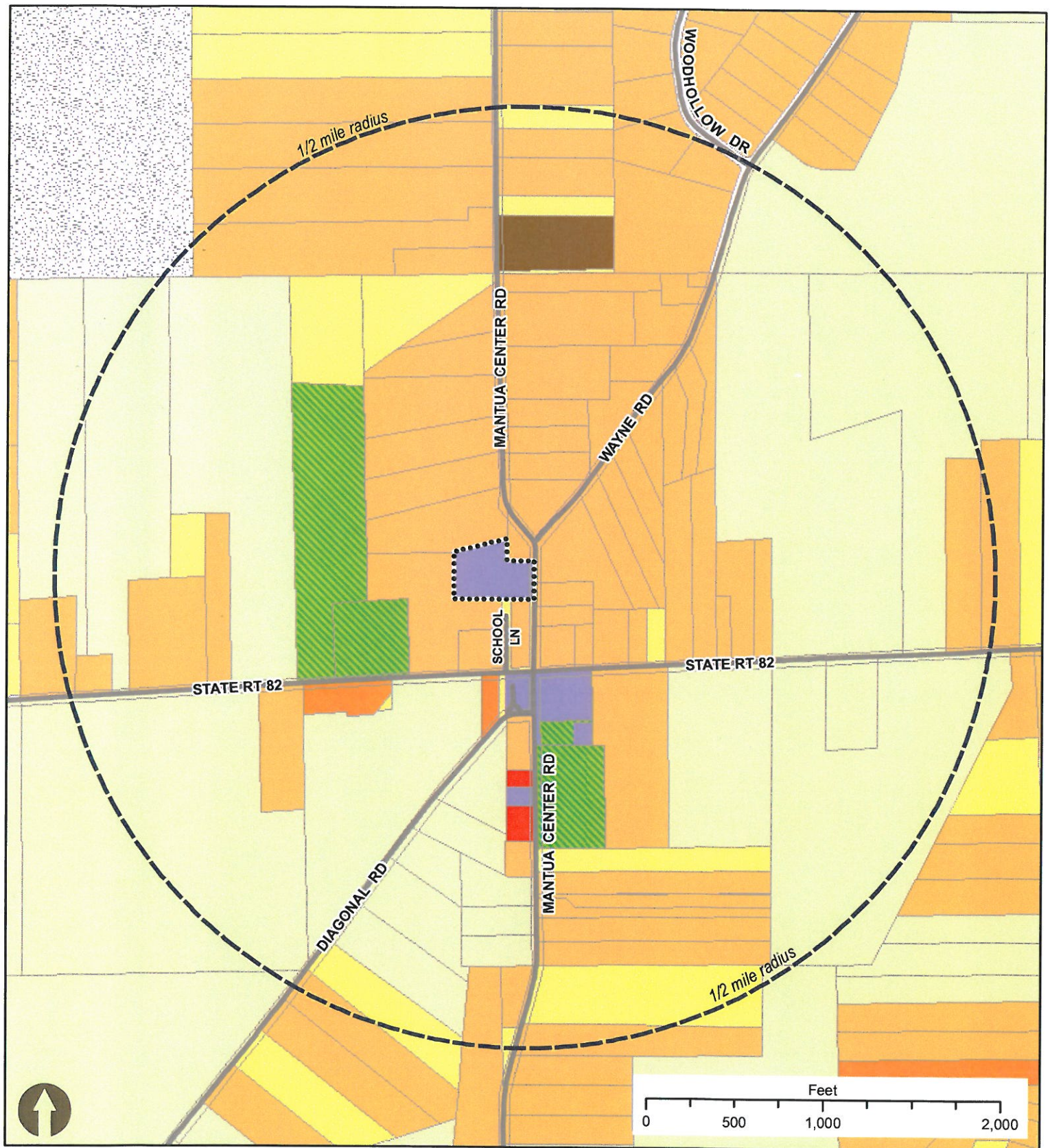




## Mantua Center School

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## Existing Land Use near Mantua Center School

2

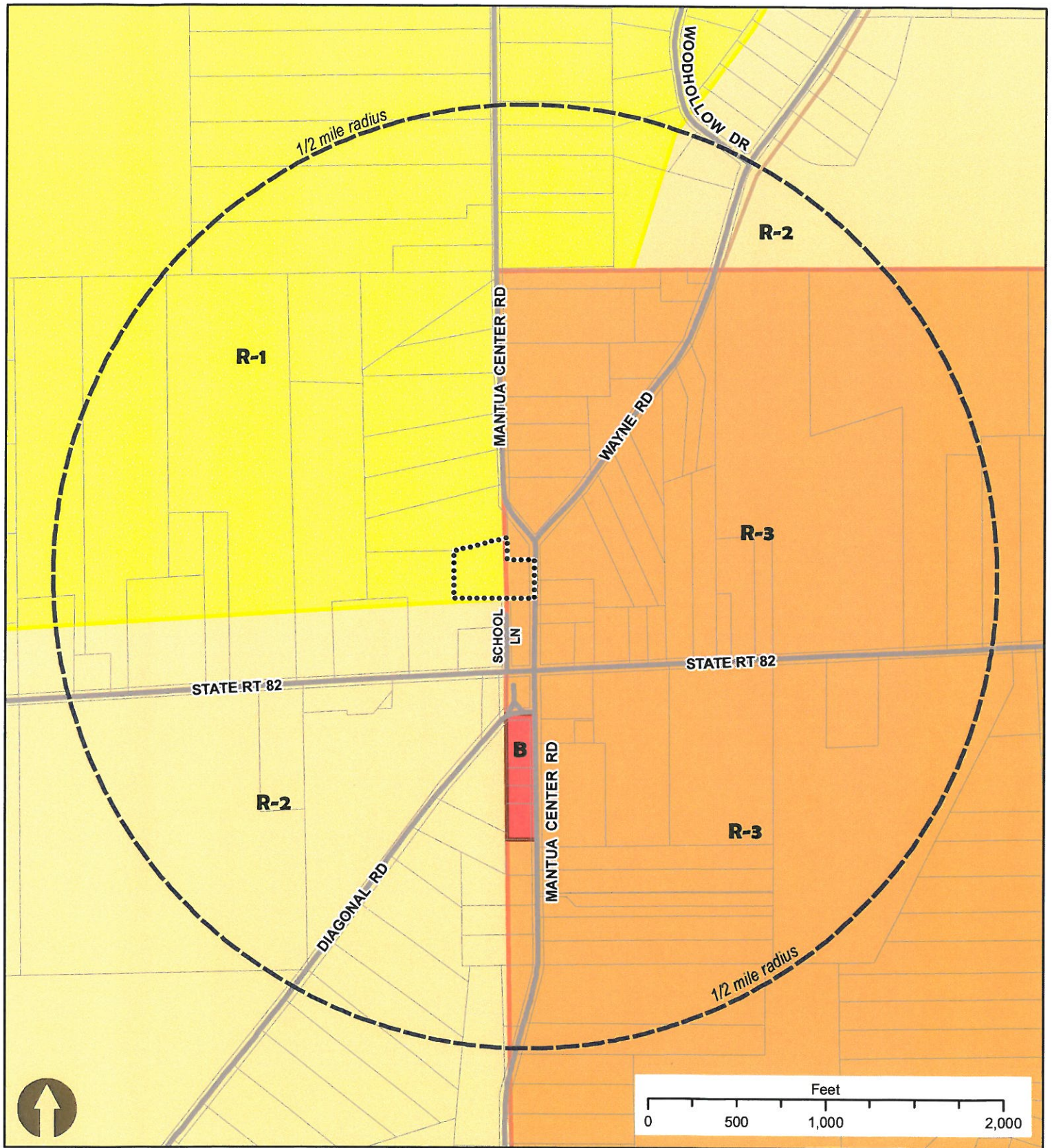
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|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Vacant residential        | Other residential | Civic, Institutional | Cemetery              |
| Single family residential | Condominiums      | Campground           | Residential preserved |
| Two-family residential    | Commercial        | Landfill             | Farmland              |
| Three-family residential  | Industrial        | Extraction           |                       |

Sources: Roads, parcels, Portage County GIS, Jan. 2014  
Land use, Portage County Auditor land use classification, 2013.

Prepared February 19, 2014







## Zoning near Mantua Center School

<span style="background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span> R-1, Low density residential	<span style="background-color: red; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span> C-1, Commercial
<span style="background-color: lightorange; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span> R-2, Medium density residential	<span style="background-color: purple; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span> LRM, Light restricted manufacturing
<span style="background-color: orange; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span> R-3, Higher density residential	<span style="background-color: darkpurple; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span> I-1, Industrial

3